

The Semaphore

A Publication of the TELEGRAPH HILL DWELLERS

Issue 248

Winter 2025

NIGHT FALLS ON
NORTH BEACH

KIDS CORNER



by Sarah Kliban
kids@thd.org

Welcome this time to Cats Corner! When dogs stole the spotlight last spring, cat parents demanded equal space for their progeny. Now it's time for the felines to shine. Meanwhile, if you'd like to ask a question or want to be interviewed yourself, contact us at kids@thd.org.



MYSHKA, 4

What's the best treat you've ever purloined?

"A freeze-dried chicken neck. Oh, it was glorious! I had to run with it, holding it in my mouth to a safe place, away from my human. I wanted to devour it all at once, but my human found me and—damn!—only let me have a little bit at a time. Such injustice!"

Besides sleeping, what is your favorite pastime?

"Opening doors. Humans don't seem to understand how doors work, but I've mastered it. And car rides—windows down, fur flying. Love to play fetch, but I'm no retriever. I toss the toy to my human, and she brings it back. Keeps her in shape."

What are you most afraid of?

"Getting stuck. I opened the back door one day, and it closed behind me. Panicked, I squeezed into a narrow space between two buildings and got trapped. Sirens blared. Firemen came. They sprayed me with water, but I made my way deeper back in and became completely stuck. Couldn't move at all. The next morning, Timothy, my human's handyman, used a loud chainsaw to cut open the wall of one of the buildings, while my human held my paw, and Timothy pulled me to safety. My hero!"

What is the most embarrassing thing you've ever experienced?

"Up at Lake Tahoe, a baby bat flew down the chimney and into the cabin, and I was ready to save the day. But my human had other plans—held me captive and opened all doors so it could fly out, only to invite the whole bat family in. My human forced us to sleep in the bathroom all night. I redeemed myself this year when I caught another baby bat and three baby mice and brought them to her. You're welcome."



ROO, 10 approximately

What's the best treat you've ever purloined?

"Why steal when I've got the best food in the house? A bowl of Friskies, a spoonful of pureed pumpkin at bedtime, and, sometimes, a squirt of tuna juice. I pretend not to see the Tall One sneaking my pumpkin. Rude!"

Besides sleeping, what is your favorite pastime?

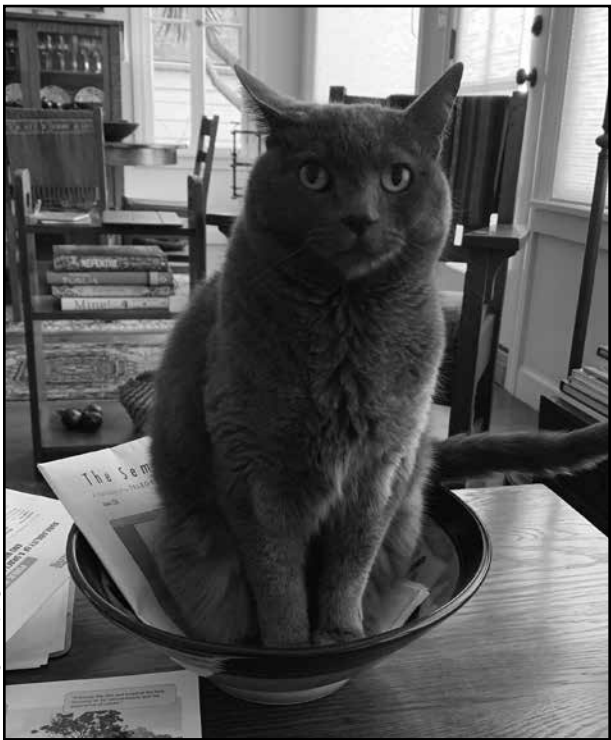
"Jumping onto the highest bookcase or squeezing into an open cupboard and looking down at the peasants. I dominate the hall with my ping-pong soccer skills, running up and down."

What are you most afraid of?

"The suitcase. It means the Tall Ones are abandoning me! Also, the fire escape. Love watching the crows, but stepping onto those cold bars feels like flirting with disaster. So high. So scary."

What is the most embarrassing thing you've ever experienced?

"That time I miscalculated a leap from my cat tree and landed flat on my face. It happens, okay? Moving on."



KIKI, 17.5

(originally La-kik which means 'to lick' in Hebrew)

What's the best treat you've ever purloined?

"What's the best treat I haven't purloined? I'm the most spoiled cat on the Hill. My favorites are pieces of broiled salmon and chicken from my folks' dinner plates—these are the best. And I lick butter if left on the counter. Whether they're looking or not, it's mine!"

Besides sleeping, what is your favorite pastime?

"Bird watching, especially the zippy little hummingbirds. I also enjoy rolling in catnip and chasing my toy mouse. And sipping a little milk when my people are making lattes in the morning. When I jump up on the kitchen counter, they know exactly what I want."

What are you most afraid of?

"Coyotes, especially when they come into the garden. They think I'm a snack. When they show up, I'm under the bed faster than you can say 'predator.'"

What is the most embarrassing thing you've ever experienced?

"When I escaped out the backdoor and couldn't get back in and ended up hiding under the stairs so the coyotes wouldn't get me. My people finally found me at 2 a.m."



COSMO, 12 (aka Mr. Mo)

What's the best treat you've ever purloined?

"Does an avocado plant count as a treat? Because I ate the one, unbeknownst to me, my mom was trying to grow. They were even madder when I scarfed her birthday sunflowers, a gift from my dad."

Besides sleeping, what is your favorite pastime?

"I like watching the crows that come to sit on the porch railing. The hummingbirds are even more entertaining. But I can't get at them because there's glass between us. I learned that the hard way. I also enjoy chasing string, scratching furniture when mom and dad aren't watching, and terrorizing houseplants."

What are you most afraid of?

"The vacuum cleaner. That's the suck monster. The doorbell is suspicious, too. And don't even get me started on the coffee grinder."

What is the most embarrassing thing you've ever experienced?

"I snuck out the front door once but got so scared that I cried to come back in. So much for my tough-guy image. I'm big and strong, but I'm no match for the coyotes I heard that night. They do howl louder than I do, if that's any consolation."

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Telegraph Hill Dwellers!

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and become part of this active community!

LETTERS TO MY DEAD NAME
(Life in transition)
Poems
by Richelle Lee Slota,
THD member
bluecedarpress.com



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Nick Ferris
President@thd.org

As President of Telegraph Hill Dwellers and someone who grew up in North Beach, I thought now would be an opportune time to reflect on how I see our neighborhood right now, how we got here, and, ultimately, why I am so excited about our future.

Over the last few years, our neighborhood has seen extraordinary growth and revitalization, reaffirming its status as one of San Francisco's cultural and historical treasures.

Reflection

First, let's celebrate our accomplishments. North Beach is doing incredibly well! It's easy to get pulled into the spiral of negativity plaguing our news cycles or misinformation pushed by opportunistic politicians. Let's keep things in perspective and acknowledge the progress we've made in recent times. Washington Square Park is once again our neighborhood's living room, thanks to the installation of proper drainage. The Embarcadero Freeway parcels have been built out as affordable housing, including, most recently, Broadway Cove at Broadway and Front Street. The Broadway streetscape improvements—the stretch of street from the Broadway Tunnel to the Embarcadero—are completed.

We have a new pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Stockton and Green Streets, bringing a much-needed shortcut to cross Columbus. We saw a Commercial Vacancy tax pass, Luke's Local was brought to the neighborhood, and Club Fugazi reopened as home to the 7 Fingers. We planted 51 trees around the neighborhood in partnership with Friends of the Urban Forest this past year, and, last, minimum density housing legislation, requiring new housing development to have multiple units instead of massive monster homes, was enacted.

We have seen our small business community grow, too. The Savoy Tivoli, North Beach Restaurant, and Park Tavern are again back in business. Over the past year, two new cafes have opened on Columbus Avenue—Compton Coffee and Cafe Angelo—bringing fresh energy and charm. Grant Avenue is flourishing, with the 1200 block boasting just one vacancy, the 1300 block having none, and the 1400 block welcoming two new businesses (Seaplane Shirts and another business with a lease signed and soon to be announced).

Green Street has come alive with activity: April Jean is now open, and it all echoes the vibrancy I

remember from years past. These are just a few of the major wins and advancements I have seen, and I am sure you can think of many more.

How did we get here?

Our resilience during COVID-19 played a huge role. We adopted policies that supported businesses without compromising the neighborhood's character. For example, we were the first in San Francisco to introduce parklets, starting with Caffè Trieste. This innovation, rooted in our community's creativity, was soon adopted citywide.

The formula retail ban has been a cornerstone of our success. Today, any business with more than 11 stores worldwide is not allowed in North Beach, ensuring that North Beach retains its unique character, free from the encroachment of generic corporate chains. The ban supports the small businesses we all love where the proprietor is often working in the storefront. It also prevents gentrification because chains can pay higher rents, thus setting up a domino effect once retail tenants like Starbucks enter the picture, as it can incentivize some landlords to force beloved businesses out to attract a Starbucks-like tenant at a much higher rate.

Strong tenant protections and rent control have also been essential, guarding against large corporate landlords who manage hundreds of apartments without personal connection to the community. When people move to North Beach, they often stay permanently and can do so because of these protections. A core part of THD's mission has become educating tenants on their rights and helping them when in need. We must continue to protect against illegal evictions and the loss of rent-controlled units.

Our smaller-scale buildings are also part of what make this neighborhood so special. There's a beauty in how all buildings scale up Telegraph Hill until you reach Coit Tower. Not until I lived in New York City did I fully appreciate the hills with the Bay in the background and bright blue skies, all unblocked by cookie-cutter towers. All this, combined with tree plantings, thoughtful zoning controls, and the many neighbors dedicated to beautifying and protecting our community, provide an essential glimpse into how we ensure our neighborhood remains diverse, livable, and affordable going forward.

Finally, we have had excellent leadership, and I would like to thank our former Supervisor, Aaron Peskin. I think all reading this and who reside in this

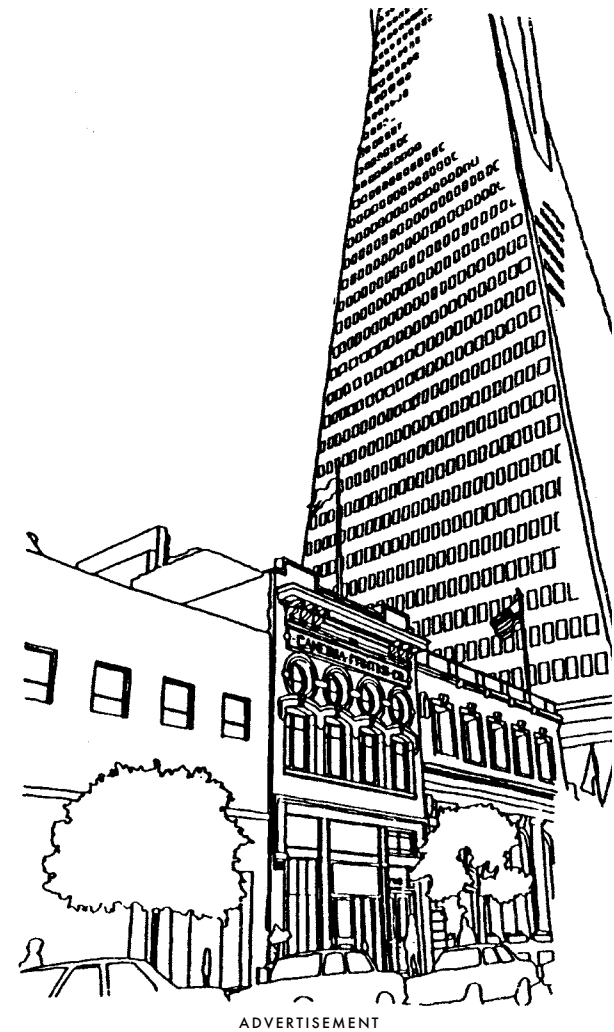
area will say we live in one of, if not the greatest, neighborhoods in San Francisco. Aaron Peskin has been our Supervisor for 17 of the past 24 years. He is one of the smartest and most respected San Francisco politicians of recent time. Known for his tireless work ethic and encyclopedic knowledge of the history of legislation, he has been a prolific and effective legislator. We have been guided to the outstanding position we are in today, and we're grateful for his dedication to San Francisco.

Why I'm Excited

As President of Telegraph Hill Dwellers, I could not be more excited for the year ahead. Our membership has grown significantly, and we now have more members than at any point since I have been on the board. This increase in participation reflects the deep sense of pride and engagement within our community, and it energizes our entire board as we plan for an impactful and enjoyable year. We are thrilled to have more people than ever contributing their voices, ideas, and talents to make our neighborhood an even better place to live.

The recent supervisorial election revealed an inspiring statistic: About a quarter of voters in our District were first-time participants. This means many new residents are moving into the neighborhood, bringing fresh perspectives and a renewed vibrancy to our community. This influx of new neighbors presents an exciting opportunity for growth. At the same time, it reminds us of the importance of sharing our rich history—how this community came to be the beloved place that has attracted so many in the first place. By fostering a sense of continuity and connection between long-standing residents and newcomers, we will strengthen the fabric of our neighborhood.

Looking forward, one of our key goals is to organize more social events that bring people together in meaningful and fun ways. Whether it's casual gatherings, seasonal celebrations, or activities that highlight our shared interests, we are committed to creating opportunities for neighbors to connect. Additionally, we will be hosting community days of service, where we will roll up our sleeves to plant trees, improve our public spaces, and take on projects that benefit everyone. These hands-on efforts not only beautify our surroundings but also build lasting bonds between neighbors working side-by-side. I am excited to see what we can accomplish together as we continue to grow, celebrate, and serve this incredible community we all call home.



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OUR CITIZEN COYOTES

by Kristen Foley
kristen.foley@thd.org

Janet Kessler provided a room full of nature enthusiasts and curious neighbors an informative talk about San Francisco coyotes at the North Beach Library on November 12.

Kessler has been documenting coyote behavior for more than 17 years through field work across San Francisco neighborhoods, capturing stunning photos and videos of these fascinating animals. She is a self-taught naturalist who has dedicated her time to



educating the public about our often misunderstood four-legged residents.

“They are much more intelligent than most people think. They think and plan ahead; they have direction and purpose to their actions,” Kessler said. “They have individual relationships and routines. They are protective of their areas and have likes and dislikes between themselves. They love to play, they hunt for a living, and they have flawless memories.”

Kessler’s presentation covered the origin of coyotes in San Francisco and their behaviors and family dynamics. The audience reveled in her spectacular photos and videos of coyote calls and activity. Made by her own observations using facial recognition, Kessler shared a territory map that outlined the 20 regions in San Francisco where coyotes are most prevalent. She closed her presentation focusing on the distinct characteristics of the coyotes of North Beach.

The most important thing people need to know about coyotes, Kessler said, is to keep pets on a leash when coyotes are around and to walk away from them. “Coexistence is really easy; keep away from them. Don’t let

pets roam free, and don’t feed coyotes.”

If you missed this captivating talk, you can visit her coyote blog at www.coyoteyipps.com or attend Kessler’s next presentation at 3 p.m. on February 15 at Bernal Heights Branch Library, 500 Cortland Avenue, San Francisco.

Keep an eye out for email announcements regarding more thought-provoking talks at the North Beach Library in 2025.



PHOTOS © JANET KESSLER



PARKS & TREES REPORT

by Mike Rothmann, Committee Chair
mike.rothmann@thd.org

The Parks & Trees Committee, and by extension this column, focuses mostly on advocating for the expansion of our urban forest. We’ve worked hard to fill empty sidewalk basins and to save perfectly healthy mature trees from being removed in the name of development.

Here, however, I’d like to shift focus to pruning and in some cases, removal. Several factors have led me to write this article. In addition to the unprecedented tornado warning (which, while not resulting in an actual tornado in San Francisco, did bring high winds and dramatic photos of cars smashed by fallen branches and trees), a recent trip to Japan, where shaping and maintaining trees is an art form, have profoundly shifted my perspective.

Our public spaces are crucial, and, recently, I’ve come across two in particular that feel neglected: Pioneer Park and Jack Early Park. These two parks, Pioneer Park, under the supervision of the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), and Jack Early Park, in a gray area but technically managed by the Department of Public Works (DPW), have trees that have become so overgrown that they interfere with the original design and pose a potential risk for catastrophic failure.



The current state of the Cypresses.

© MICHAEL ROTHMANN

RESTORING THE VISION: ADDRESSING TREE MANAGEMENT IN PIONEER AND JACK EARLY PARKS

How many of you have seen tourists fumbling with the coin-operated binoculars under the empty pedestal by the parking lot in front of Coit Tower? The views have mostly been blocked by overgrown cypresses for years. Despite their name, Monterey Cypresses are not native to the region. Although historic (the trees in question approaching 100 years old), they do not contribute to the iconic foliage on the hill that defines the skyline and could incrementally be replaced with native oak varieties, slow growing trees with larger canopies and less vertical growth.

In an *SFGATE* article from January 2024, the question of replacing the trees was posed to a representative from RPD, who cited the structural stability of the hill as the reason for the deferred maintenance. I question whether this is true, especially given that Rec/Park has successfully tackled restorations on even more challenging terrain, such as the bluffs that face the ocean in the Presidio.

For those who haven’t visited Jack Early Park, it’s on the north end of Grant Avenue and consists of a staircase leading up to a viewing platform. Created in 1962 and worked on until his death, the park is named after Telegraph Hill Dweller Jack E. Early. He called the north side of Telegraph Hill ‘Alcatraz Heights’ and planted only one eucalyptus and one Monterey pine. I doubt he would appreciate that a pepper tree and a Victorian box tree immediately adjacent to the viewing platform have grown so tall that they now block the view envisioned and created by this iconic ad man.

DPW prioritizes pruning street trees and has justifiably removed robust species, such as the *Ficus macrocarpa*, from its approved planting lists in the name of safety. Even though we have continuously urged the city’s agencies to plant more trees to expand the urban forest, when trees begin to obscure and detract from the City’s natural beauty, it’s time to remember that balance in nature sometimes needs help.

Public parks are a gift to visitors and residents alike. They should be maintained with the original design intent or intentionally improved, continuing the tradition of beautifying our City. In 1994 for his work on the Park, Jack Early was recognized by San Francisco and by a young nonprofit, Friends of the Urban



A dapper woman looking out from Jack Early Park with an unimpeded view.

SOURCE: GAIL TODD, *THE CHRONICLE* 2007

Forest. In Jack Early’s obituary, then THD President Bob Tibbits said, “Jack Early Park stands as an inspiration to all would be urban foresters.” Jack Early put 33 years of his life into his mini park and demonstrated a commitment to his community in doing so. Telegraph Hill Dwellers and the Parks & Trees Committee will continue this work in 2025!



Pioneer Park in 1937.

SOURCE: OpenSFHistory.org WNP26.1306



DISTRICT 3 SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

by Supervisor Danny Sauter
danny.sauter@sfgov.org

It is a great honor to write to you as your District 3 Supervisor. In the years ahead, I look forward to keeping in touch regularly here thanks to Telegraph Hill Dwellers and *The Semaphore*, a timeless and invaluable publication.

My background is rooted in District 3's neighborhoods, with a special affinity for North Beach and Telegraph Hill. I've been a resident of our neighborhood for 11 years. Neighborhood organizing in North Beach is what set me on my path to City Hall. I have served on the board of North Beach Neighbors, including time as President. During the pandemic, I joined with neighbors to start a free delivery program called North Beach Delivers that supported more than 40 restaurants. And it has been a cherished experience to work closely with your President Nick Ferris over the past eight years to start and run the North Beach Farmers Market.

As I look across District 3, I see tremendous opportunities. Our storied District 3 neighborhoods,

from North Beach to Nob Hill, Chinatown to Russian Hill, Union Square to the Financial District, the Barbary Coast to Fisherman's Wharf, have an outsized impact on our city and are often the face of San Francisco to visitors from around the world. We can support our incredible neighborhood merchants by lowering barriers to run small businesses and fill up our empty storefronts. We can reimagine downtown by welcoming more residents, and we can bring new attractions to Union Square and Fisherman's Wharf. And we can improve daily life in our neighborhoods by ensuring our streets are always clean and safe, our schools are open and thriving, and core Muni lines provide frequent, reliable transit service.

To be sure, San Francisco has serious challenges. Our reputation has taken a bruising on a global stage, and we have much work to do to restore the damage done by headlines, some exaggerated but many warranted. Our budget shortfall will force us to make difficult decisions and live within our means. And, decades of ignoring our housing shortage threaten to make life more difficult and expensive for vulnerable renters and young families.

Despite these obstacles, I remain committed to San Francisco, and I know our neighbors do, too. I knocked on more than 12,000 doors during the campaign and had the chance to hear from many of you. I listened to many hopes, dreams, and frustrations expressed. Above all, I heard a mandate to play a strong role in restoring residents' faith and trust in our government. This is a monumental task, but I strongly believe we can make progress in ways large and small.

I hope to build on the work that former Supervisor Peskin did to always recognize our district as a coalition of neighborhoods with unique needs and responsibilities. My team recently had the chance to meet with his staff to ensure ongoing projects and constituent matters are transitioned without any interruption.

The work ahead will take contributions from all of us. I invite you to engage with our office. We're happy to welcome you to Room 260 in City Hall, or to meet you in the neighborhood for coffee. You may reach us by email at SauterStaff@sfgov.org.

See you in the neighborhood,
Danny Sauter



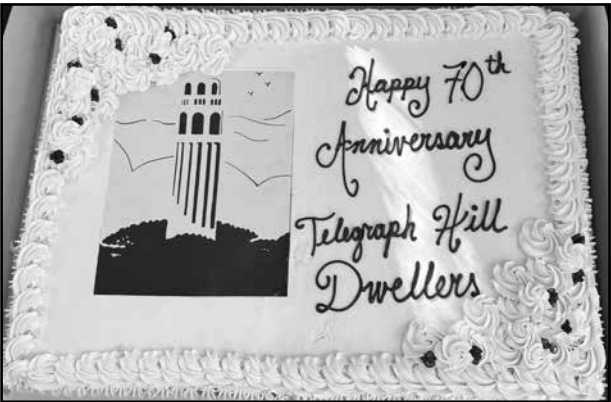
Kim Pendleton, Committee Co-Chair
kim.pendleton@thd.org

CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF COMMUNITY

This year marked a remarkable milestone for our organization as we celebrated Telegraph Hill Dwellers' 70th anniversary with an unforgettable birthday event. The afternoon brought together members and friends from across the community to honor our legacy and the incredible journey that has brought us to this point.

Held at Coit Tower, the milestone kicked off with a heartfelt welcome from Board President Nick Ferris, who shared THD's history and introduced many of its past leaders. Reflecting on the organization's core values—preserving and protecting, building community, celebrating history and engaging in city affairs—Nick emphasized how these principles have guided us through decades of challenges and successes.

While celebrating our group's 70th, we also honored an important anniversary for the Coit Tower Murals. The Murals, celebrated for their vibrant depiction of California's history and culture, marked their 90th anniversary in 2024. Created in 1934 as part of a New Deal-era public works project, the Coit Tower Murals were painted by a group of artists commissioned by the federal Works Progress Administration. These iconic works, located inside San Francisco's



Anniversary cake.

© KIM PENDLETON

Coit Tower, reflect a variety of themes, from labor and agriculture to social issues of the time. Over the decades, the Murals have become an integral part of San Francisco's artistic and cultural heritage, attracting visitors worldwide and highlighting the vision of both the artists and the city's commitment to preserving public art.

We had three guest speakers throughout the day, discussing the Murals: Professor Robert Cherny, reading from his new book, *The Coit Tower Murals: New Deal Art and Political Controversy in San Francisco*; Harvey Smith from *The Living New Deal*, speaking about the national impact of the Coit Tower Murals, and Jon Golinger (former THD Board president), performing a scene from his play about the creation of the Coit Tower Murals, *Painting Coit Tower*.

Guests were treated to a festive afternoon featuring live jazz music, delicious food, perfect October weather, and an amazing cake!

The 70th birthday celebration was a



Crowd at the anniversary party.

© KIM PENDLETON

fitting tribute to the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' enduring impact and a reminder of the talented and passionate people who have helped shape its legacy. We look forward to continuing to serve our community and grow together for many more years to come.

Here's to 70 more years preserving and protecting our unique and special neighborhood! ✂

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PLANNING & ZONING REPORT

by Stan Hayes, Nancy Shanahan, and Mary Lipian,
Committee Co-Chairs
PZ@thd.org

Here we report on projects, some with updated information, that we've discussed in previous issues as well as new ones that we bring to your attention.

425 Broadway

This project proposes to construct two new separate mixed-use buildings on the site of an existing garage and parking lot at 425 Broadway, a location within the Jackson Square Historic District Extension. You might recall that several years ago on that site, the City approved a five-story building facing Broadway and a separate eight-story building and underground parking garage, both facing Montgomery Street. The approved project had 41 residential units, with three onsite below market rate (BMR) units.

As you can see in Figure 1, the project sponsor is now seeking to modify the approved project as follows:

- Significantly increase the number of units from 41 to 74, an 80% increase,
- Increase the height of the Broadway Building from five to seven stories,
- Provide no onsite affordable units,
- Provide no onsite parking for its expected more than 150 residents,
- Increase incompatibility with the historic district in which it is located,
- Increase shadow impacts on nearby single room occupancy (SRO) hotels and apartment buildings and the John Yehall Chin Elementary School and playground, and
- Increase gentrification leading to further displacement of low-income and senior residents of multiple SRO hotels in the immediate vicinity of the project.

As of this writing, the modified project continues to undergo environmental assessment. As an early step, in mid-October, SF Planning issued a Notification of Project Receiving Environmental Review. According to that notice, SF Planning "is in the initial stages of studying this project's environmental effects." In response to the notice, THD filed a letter offering initial comments, including a number of recommendations. Significantly, we argued that the modified project does not qualify for a categorical exemption being considered from environmental assessment requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

777 Sutter Street

This is a State Density Bonus project that proposes to demolish the famed Fleur de Lys Restaurant and to construct a 240-foot, 26-story mixed-use apartment building at 777 Sutter Street. (See Figure 2). This project, which is being referred to as a "super-skinny" high-rise, is located within the National Register-

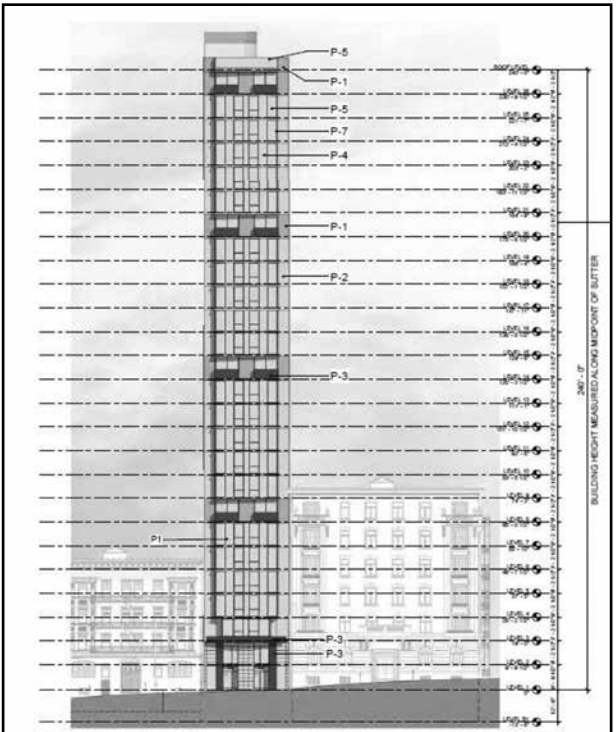


Figure 2. "Super-skinny" high-rise proposed at 777 Sutter Street.

DEVELOPERS RENDERING

UPDATE AND NEW PROJECTS



Figure 1. Modified project proposed at 425 Broadway.

DEVELOPERS RENDERING

California-listed Lower Nob Hill Apartment Hotel Historic District. The building would have 36 units, including six onsite BMR units. Of the 26 stories, 14 floors would have just a single five-bedroom unit and eight would have two units. The project sponsor is seeking a State Density Bonus, including a waiver of the lot's 80-foot height limit and processing under SB 423 streamlined permit procedures (planning staff only, no public review, etc.).

While this project is not within THD's boundaries, it's important because it is so strongly precedent-setting for such lots throughout the City. The lot on which the project would be built is just 35 feet x 100 feet (0.08 acres), with the project proposing a density of 444 units/acre. We're concerned that, if it could happen with this project, it could happen anywhere, including in our neighborhoods. THD participated in a press conference protesting the project and joined with other neighborhood organizations in sending emails to the Historic Preservation Commission opposing it.

955 Sansome Street

We continue to oppose this State Density Bonus Project within the Northeast Waterfront Historic District that proposes to demolish the existing two-story garage and replace it with a 24-story mixed-use building with 132 units, including 26 onsite BMR units. As put forward, this super-sized high-rise building would be:

- More than three times the City's zoned height limit,
- More than three times taller than the tallest building in the historic district,
- More than seven times taller than the 40-foot height limit of the historic neighborhood adjoining it, uphill in the same block, and
- Even taller than Telegraph Hill itself.

We believe that this project threatens to damage

the City and this historic neighborhood forever. And, it doesn't need to be that way. This is San Francisco, a world-class city of innovation. We don't have to choose between affordable housing *and* vibrant neighborhoods. We can, and we should, have *both*. We want a project to be *right-sized*. And, *right-designed* to fit in its neighborhood. This project is neither. We are continuing to monitor this project closely. Although we have nothing new to report as of the date of publication, we will keep you posted on further developments.

875 Sansome Street (aka 303 Broadway)

Another proposed State Density Bonus project would demolish the existing two-story office building located within the Jackson Square Extension District and replace it with an eight-story residential building with a one-story basement garage and 21 units, including three onsite BMR units. The proposed new building would be 87'-11" in height next door to the three-story historic building at 333 Broadway. As with 955 Sansome, we are continuing to monitor this project closely. Although we have nothing new to report as of the date of publication, we will keep you posted.


1088 Sansome Street

Some good news. For now, the third proposed multi-story high-rise on Sansome, a 112-unit, 17-story condo tower appears dead. Proposed by former San Francisco Building Inspection Commission President Angus McCarthy and backed by billionaire investor Michael Moritz, the project, within the Northeast Waterfront Historic District, sought to replace the historic Bemis Bag Building at 1088 Sansome with a development rising more than 200 feet.

To join, or to get information from, the THD Planning & Zoning Committee, just send an email to PZ@thd.org. We look forward to hearing from you.



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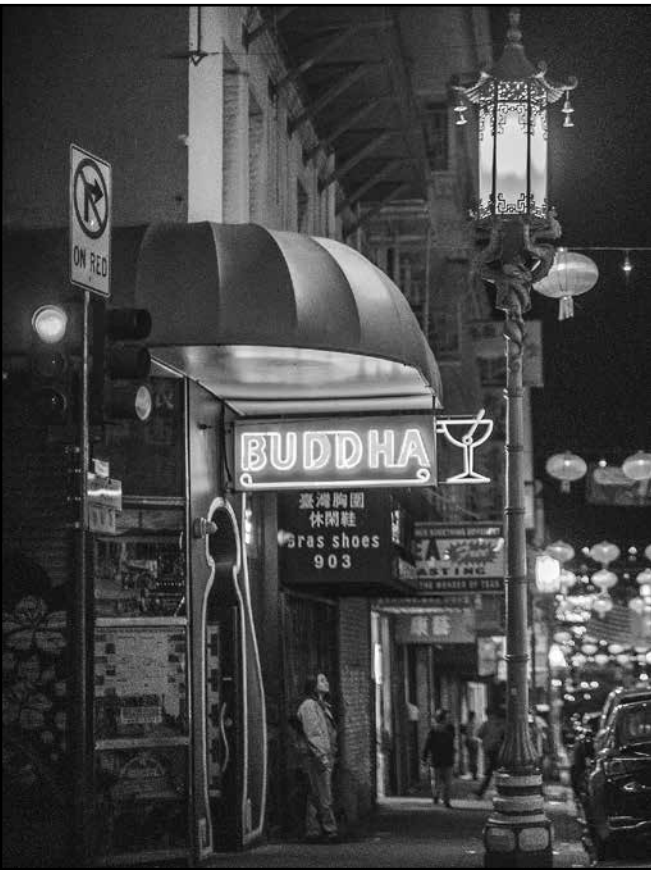
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TRANSPORTATION REPORT

by Howard Wong, AIA, Committee Chair
howard.wong@thd.org



Cable Cars could be eliminated—though unlikely due to their economic value for tourism and San Francisco's iconic imagery. Cutting frequency/hours is an option. Eliminating three cable lines and one F-Historic Streetcar line would save \$33 million/year.

© HOWARD WONG

Transit Budget Crisis Overview

As State/Federal assistance funds run out, with little chance of additional subsidies, transit agencies are facing fiscal cliffs and doom loop scenarios—where service cuts exacerbate ridership declines, triggering more cuts. Without sustainable funding sources, transit agencies face on-going annual structural deficits. Muni: \$360 million. BART: \$300-\$400 million. Caltrain: \$36 million.

Tough Choices Ahead

Transit agencies are pondering dire options—some of which can preserve transit service at the expense of future needs. Muni is analyzing a range of unprecedented fare/fee/fine hikes and service cuts, including suspending neighborhood/hilltop bus routes. During the pandemic, many hilltop residents felt trapped without routes like the 35-Eureka, 36-Teresita, 37-Corbett, and 39-Coit. Support is needed for Muni's policy goal of having every resident within a 1/4-mile or 2-3 blocks of a transit stop, thus protecting neighborhood lines. Other service cuts might include decreased frequencies, suspending cable cars/historic streetcars, earlier owl hours, and a host of route shortenings/suspensions. A Muni Funding Working Group is analyzing options and might set priorities in early 2025.

Possible Flexing of Capital Funds to Operations

One of the largest potential sources of Muni operating funds is the flexing of capital funds—up to \$205 million annually. Within legal restrictions, certain capital project funds can be shifted to support operations. But in the long term, smaller capital investments would degrade service reliability, street/safety improvements, and necessary maintenance—leading to higher costs down the line. Flexing funds would be a stop-gap measure until more permanent funding sources are identified.



Hilltop bus routes could be cut due to their relatively low ridership—though critical for seniors and disabled residents. The 35-Eureka, 36-Teresita, 37-Corbett and 39-Coit buses run on SF's steepest grades. The 39-Coit is a neighborhood gem.

© HOWARD WONG



Historic Streetcars were suspended during the long pandemic. The F-Line has been restored, while the E-Line to Caltrain Station remains out of service. The F-Line is a useful connector of Market Street to the Embarcadero/Waterfront.

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Possible Flexing of Federal Funds

In combination with Muni flexing of local capital funds, the state can flex federal transportation funds. By example, Pennsylvania's governor shifted federal highway funds to Philadelphia's transit system—a rarely-used but available tool. California receives billions of federal dollars each year to maintain all transportation systems. By default, 80 percent goes to highways and 20 percent to mass transit. Governors can choose to flex half of their state's highway funding to transit projects instead but not without political repercussions though, since road projects have their constituency.

The Great Hope: MTC Regional Transportation Funding Measure

A large regional funding measure is targeted for the November 2026 election. There are disagreements amongst the Bay Area's nine counties, in regard to funding size/source/distribution, duration, consolidation of 27 transit agencies, impacts on local transit tax measures, and more. The MTC (Metropolitan Transportation Commission) is polling voters on two funding options, developed by an MTC Select Committee.

Option 1 is a 10-year half-cent sales tax to fund transit only, generating \$560 million a year (includes only Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties, with an opt-in provision for Santa Clara County).

Option 2 is a 30-year hybrid sales tax/parcel tax to fund transit and infrastructure, generating \$1.3 to \$1.5 billion a year (includes same four counties, with opt-in provisions for Marin, Napa, Solano, Sonoma, and Santa Clara counties).

The polling would also assess voter support for a variable tax rate, with a higher tax rate for San Francisco, which has the highest operating needs.

Public Transit Hope

There is strong voter support for transforming Bay



Bus routes, such as lower-utilized lines and those with parallel service, could be cut—saving \$63 million/year. Reducing frequency by 50% saves \$71 million. The most draconian scenario of service cuts would save \$181 million.

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TRANSIT 2025: A TIPPING POINT



Caltrain has had a 57% drop in weekday ridership—due to hybrid and remote work. Full system electrification has increased ridership—with weekend boardings surpassing pre-pandemic levels. A Regional Transit Funding Measure is key.

© HOWARD WONG

Area transit, improving mobility choices throughout the region, and decreasing transportation costs/traffic congestion/environmental impacts. MTC has focused on transforming regional transit—with a new Regional Network Manager, formal coordination amongst 27 transit agencies, coordination of regional transfers/mapping/wayfinding/Clipper cards/accessibility/equity, and more. Like great metropolitan transportation systems around the world, the Bay Area's disjointed system can evolve and transform. Voters need to be inspired by a transformative vision for Bay Area transit.

"An advanced city is not a place where the poor move about in cars, rather it's where even the rich use public transportation."
—Enrique Penalosa

Reminder

The "daylighting" parking law will be enforced starting on March 1, 2025. The State law prohibits parking within 20 feet of the approach side of any marked or unmarked crosswalk or within 15 feet of any crosswalk with a curb extension. Fines will start at \$40.

"Daylighting" improves pedestrian/traffic safety via high visibility at intersections and has had great success in other cities/countries. However, San Francisco will lose 14,000 parking spaces, necessitating neighborhood parking management plans—especially in already parking-deprived North Beach and environs.



"From the late 1940s, into and through the '50s, there developed a complex interaction between federal government, state and local government, real-estate interests, commercial interests and court decisions, which had the effect of undermining the mass transit system across the country."
—Noam Chomsky



BART could cut entire routes. Prior to the pandemic, BART had an admirable 70% cost recovery rate from passenger fares and parking fees. Now, only 25% of operating costs are covered by fares. A Regional Transit Funding Measure is key.

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RESTAURANT NEWS

Semaphore restaurant reviewer Stephen Listisen brings a lively perspective to a neighborhood classic. Do you have a favorite restaurant that you'd like to add to Stephen's "need to try in San Francisco" list? Let him know at semaphore@thd.org.



Exterior of Ideale, 1309 Grant Avenue. © STEPHEN LISTISEN



SOCIAL & PROGRAMS REPORT

by Kristen Foley, Committee Chair
kristen.foley@thd.org

Telegraph Hill Dwellers gathered together for the organization's annual holiday celebration on Tuesday, December 10th, this year at Tony Gemignani's Capo's. The team at Capo's kept our bellies full with a magnificent buffet, highlighting the best of the best on the restaurant's menu. Members enjoyed a delicious four-course meal that had something for everyone. The best parts were Capo's signature Detroit-style pizzas, baked artichoke dip, and delectable cannolis. The space offered a cozy haven from the chilly winter night where members could catch up and reunite after a busy year. And Capo's holiday decorations (and libations) definitely got the group into a cheery mood! President Nick Ferris spoke briefly to the group to acknowledge and thank the THD board and all members. Contributions by our members are what keep THD thriving and North Beach unique. If you missed the fun this year, not to fret! Keep a lookout for notifications regarding our Spring Dinner. And if you haven't already, check out Capo's located at 641 Vallejo Street to discover what our members enjoyed in December! ✂

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IDEALE



Tiramisu. © STEPHEN LISTISEN

by Stephen Listisen

Since my first report for *The Semaphore*, word got out among my social circle that I'm writing about my experiences at local restaurants. However, the upside of my peers' knowing this is that more people want to join when I dine at new spots (or, rather, spots that are new to me), meaning I get to try more dishes! So, just before six of my friends and I all went our separate ways for the holidays—Plane-, Train-, and Automobile-style for some of us—we had the opportunity to visit Ideale, a North Beach mainstay since 1993. Upon reading on social media in October that Ideale was to be sold to employees before the end of 2024, I moved it to the top of my Notes app "need to try in San Francisco" list. Ideale was another restaurant I've walked past no less than one thousand times as a resident of Grant Avenue myself. When we arrived for our 8 p.m. dinner reservation, Ideale was abuzz with patrons ranging from what seemed to be tables of coworkers, friends, and families gathering for a meal before the holiday season. In a way, walking into such a cozy setting for a hearty Italian meal on a chilly December night made me feel like we had just been teleported to Rome's Trastevere neighborhood, with its endless supply of perfectly situated bohemian restaurants. The first course, a smattering of different cocktails from Ideale's full bar, was the perfect segue to what might have been collectively the group's favorite part of the night: the antipasti. Ideale offers a classic Italian antipasti menu, ranging from salads, to different types of bruschetta, to charcuterie, in addition to a selection of Roman-style thin crusted pizzas. In between dishing out debriefs of company holiday parties and sharing our respective family plans for the next few weeks, we ordered the *crostino di filetto di manzo al gorgonzola, burrata dalla Puglia con*



Spaghetti alla Carbonara (Roman-style spaghetti with house-made guanciale, eggs, pecorino, and parmesan cheese). © STEPHEN LISTISEN

bruschetta, and a margherita pizza as appetizers. The *crostino di filetto di manzo al gorgonzola*—toasted homemade bruschetta topped with filet mignon and gorgonzola cheese—was an instant hit among the group (even those members not overly-eager carnivores, especially when it comes to red meat). The filet itself was extremely tender, and the gorgonzola was a perfectly savory finishing touch, without overpowering the meat. Seriously, we had no notes; a rare occurrence for us seven highly-opinionated twentysomethings, especially after a few martinis. For our main course, we ordered a range of different homemade pastas, including but not limited to the *spaghetti alla maurizio*, *spaghetti alla carbonara*, *fettucine alla norcina*, *lasagna al ragu*, and *gnocci di patate con spuntature di maiale*. Around when we received our pastas, we realized an hour and a half had already passed, even though it felt as if we had just been seated. After a few minutes, we started to pass our plates to one another, clockwise, to sample all the different pastas. The *guanciale* in the *spaghetti alla carbonara* was notably high-quality, taking the dish's overall flavor profile to the next level. However, the *lasagna al ragu*—noted on the menu as Maurizio's (Ideale's now-former owner) famous lasagna made with a tomato, beef, and garlic ragu—was the star of the show. The meal, from start to finish, tasted both professional and homemade, making me even more excited to get home to celebrate Christmas with the Italian side of my family. Our night concluded with one fantastic, communal slice of *tiramisu*, a few nightcaps, and a lot of bittersweet "See you soon's." Ideale definitely did not disappoint! ✂

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NORTH BEACH TANGO

AN EXCITING EVENT FOR NEIGHBORS IN NORTH BEACH!

by Lisa Peers

Looking for a friendly mid-week escape that combines community gathering with music and movement? Hosted every second Wednesday of the month at Peña Pachamama, 1630 Powell Street in North Beach, these vibrant gatherings welcome all: seasoned dancers, curious beginners, and people who'd like to just eat, drink, and watch Argentine Tango danced in a social setting.

An Evening of Dance and Connection

The magic begins at 6:30 p.m. with a beginner-friendly Argentine tango class led by Era Osibe. This class focuses on essential techniques like posture, balance, and footwork, providing a solid foundation for those new to tango or seeking to refine their skills. Participation is by donation, making it accessible to all.

From 7 to 10 p.m., the floor transforms into a lively Milonga; a social dancing get-together, and dancing for all levels is encouraged. For a suggested donation of just \$10, dancers can enjoy an evening of connection, rhythm, and passion as they move to the traditional sounds of Argentina spun by fabulous guest DJs from around the Bay Area.

Plan Your Visit

The next three Wednesday dates are: **February 12**, **March 12**, and **April 9**.

4:30 p.m: Restaurant opens

6:30 p.m: Beginners Argentine tango technique class with Era Osibe (by donation)

7:00 - 10:00 p.m: Milonga – Social dancing (suggested donation \$10)

Meet the Hosts

North Beach Tango is brought to life by a passionate group of local hosts:

Lisa Peers, an actor and founder of Peers and Players, with a global team of actors who provide

GOLDEN 7 LIQUOR & DELI

by Lance Carnes

Last year, Pedro Szybel (say 'stibel') and his wife Paulette Butler bought Golden 7 Liquor & Deli at 940 Columbus Avenue at Lombard Street. Pedro and his son, Peter, are often behind the counter, cheerfully assisting customers.

When Pedro was 10, his family emigrated from Argentina to North Beach. He attended Marina Middle School, Galileo High, McAteer High, and SF State. He earned a Ph.D. at University of Notre Dame in Neuroscience and Psychology.

Next time you are in the neighborhood, stop in and meet Pedro and Peter. Both are pleasant guys. The author of this article is not a drinker, but I stop in often for a sandwich and an IT'S-IT ice cream!

Golden 7 Liquor & Deli
940 Columbus Avenue



Pedro Szybel and son Peter.

© LANCE CARNES

workplace communication skills training and coaching; Charles Carbone, a prisoner rights attorney and DJ, with the largest collection of original tango vinyl records in North America; Debra Mugnani Monroe, seasoned Jazz singer and owner of Monroe Personnel Service LLC and Temptime, staffing Bay Area businesses; and Era Osibe, a member and regular swimmer at the Dolphin Club since 1977, who studied with tango masters in Buenos Aires and is passionate about sharing her love of tango.

Their dedication to creating a welcoming atmosphere ensures that everyone, from first-timers to seasoned tangueros, feels at home.

Whether you're stepping onto the dance floor for



by Peter Stevens
peter.stevens@thd.org

TREASURER'S REPORT

While our fiscal year ends March 31, the change of the calendar year is always a good time to assess how the past year went and how things are going. First, I'd like to wish you and your families the best in this new year. Now I'd like to give a brief overview of how our budget works.

How does the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' budget work?

We strive to run a break-even operating budget, meaning we balance our yearly spending with how much we receive. Our operating receipts come primarily from three sources: membership dues, advertising from *The Semaphore*, and donations from members and community. Currently, we are on track to meet our budget on receipts and spending. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of our members, businesses that advertise, and community members who have donated.

Our operating budget helps us put on social events

the first time or you've been dancing tango for years, North Beach Tango offers a memorable experience. It's more than just an event—it's a community celebration of tango, music, and the joy of movement.

Mark your calendar for the second Wednesday of the month, and join the musical tradition at Peña Pachamama. Embrace the rhythm, savor the cuisine, and let North Beach Tango sweep you off your feet.

"A good dancer is one who listens to the music...We dance the music not the steps. Anyone who aspires to dance never thinks about what he is going to do. What he cares about is that he follows the music. You see, we are painters. We paint the music with our feet."

– Carlos Gavito



like our First Friday Art Walks, Third Thursday Happy Hours, and third Wednesday Films with Friends. The budget subsidizes our holiday and summer parties, new member events, and, this year, our 70th anniversary party.

Our largest operating expense is *The Semaphore*, a quarterly publication that you are reading right now. It is the crown jewel of our organization and has served to document our community since 1956. I highly recommend that you go to THD.org to look at its archives. We have digital copies going back to the publication's inception. This year we plan to expand *The Semaphore's* digital footprint and focus as well on our neighborhood beautification efforts.

Beyond our operating expenses, we rely on grants and donations to complete our other work. An example: We received a contribution from a member's estate that we used to plant 51 trees over the past year. We worked in partnership with Friends of the Urban Forest (FUF) to plant them, and now we are in partnership with FUF to ensure the trees have everything they need to thrive and be enjoyed by us and future residents of the Hill.

We are always looking for new and creative ways to keep Telegraph Hill the magical place that we all call home. We soon will be working on our 2025-2026 fiscal year budget. I invite all of you to reach out and discuss with me any priorities you would like to see for our organization.



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A black and white portrait of Peter L. Dwares, an older man with white hair, smiling and wearing a suit and tie.

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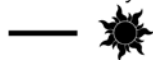
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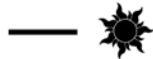
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There's no better way to be connected to your neighborhood and be a voice of the Hill than by joining Telegraph Hill Dwellers today.

Join at thd.org. If you'd prefer to have a brochure and sign-up form mailed to you, please send an email to membership@thd.org. Already a member? Give one as a gift!

Membership includes:

- A one-year subscription to news & events via email and a quarterly publication, *The Semaphore*.
- Opportunities to be active in your community. Your passion likely aligns to one of many committees.
- Social and Art & Culture events throughout the year—attend and contribute!

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Get involved in our neighborhood and make a difference! Join a THD committee and help keep the Hill a special place to live.

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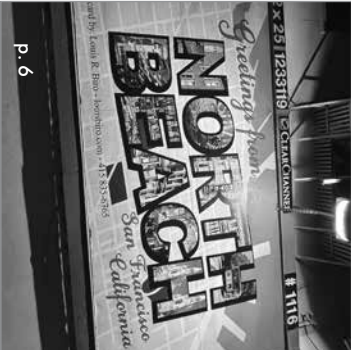
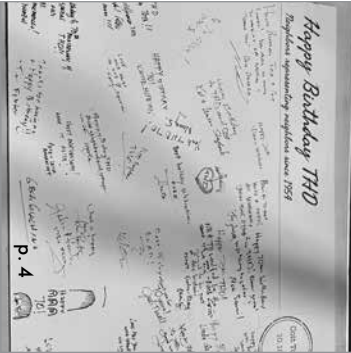
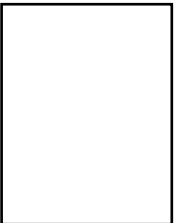
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THE SEMAPHORE

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FEATURES and COLUMNS

Kids Corner by Sarah Kilban	1	North Beach at Night photo essay	6
President's Corner by Nick Ferris	2	Transportation Report: Transit 2025: A Tipping Point by Howard Wong	8
Our Citizen Coyotes by Kristen Foley	3	Restaurant News: Ideale by Stephen Lisitsen	9
Parks and Trees Report: Restoring the Vision by Mike Rothmann	3	Social & Programs Report by Kristen Foley	9
District 3 Supervisor's Report by Danny Sauter	4	North Beach Tango by Lisa Peers	10
Celebrating 70 Years of Community by Kim Pendleton	4	Golden 7 liquor & Deli by Lance Comes	10
Planning & Zoning Report: Update and New Projects by Stan Hayes, Nancy Shanahan, and Mary Lipkin	5	Treasurer's Report by Peter Stevens	10
THD BUSINESS			
Board of Directors and Committees	11		
Become a Member	11		

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